

# GRAV DOINGS!

**When is a zombie movie not a zombie movie? When you call the living dead 'Returners,' when you add healthy doses of surrealism and when you base your script on a novel by the hottest name in Italian publishing today. Alan Jones reports on the most original new horror movie of the year - Michele Soavi's *Dellamorte Dellamore*!**

**D**ellamorte Dellamore is an adaptation of the Tiziano Sclavi book in which the legendary, and money-spinning, *Dylan Dog* comic strip character was born as Francesco Dellamorte Dellamore, gravedigger and caretaker of a cemetery in the mythical province of Buffalora. In a masterstroke of casting, *Dellamorte Dellamore* stars Rupert Everett, acknowledged by Sclavi as the visual inspiration for the look of *Dylan Dog* in the comic book phenomenon which averages over a million copies sold monthly.

This cross-cultural blurring of film reality with comic strip fantasy has spelt box-office magic in Italy for Soavi. When it opened last March, *Dellamorte Dellamore* instantly attracted a cult following and fabulous reviews. One critic even called Soavi the 'New Wave Sergio Leone.' But the movie was a huge gamble for Soavi who confided his fears while on location last Autumn.

"Will *Dylan Dog* fans like Rupert playing the early genesis of their hero as an impotent graveyard guardian? Or will they feel cheated because we are trading on his look and nothing much else? Making a film from a book which formed the basis of a popular cartoon that's tied to a well-known actor's face is not the best starting point for a movie! The pressure of audience expectation on the home front is an enormous weight on my shoulders. I must wink at the people who know *Dylan Dog* while making a separate entertainment with meaning outside that universe. I only hope I can pull it off while

retaining the same basic mood and philosophy."

## GORGEOUS GHOULS!

Dellamorte Dellamore is the first project from Audifilm, a company formed by Soavi, screenwriter Gianni Romoli (who penned Soavi's *The Sect*) and their mutual friend Tilde Corsi, Bernardo Bertolucci's longtime publicist. "I was fed up directing movies for Dario Argento and not getting the full recognition for it!" explained Soavi. "We knew producing in the current climate was a risk, and none of us had ever done it before, but we wanted to make *Dellamorte Dellamore* so badly."

The triumvirate couldn't have chosen to option a more unusual book than the precursor to *Dylan Dog*, telling the strange tale of a graveyard watchman and his quest to stop the dead from invading the world of the living. When a mysterious epidemic causes all the cadavers in his cemetery to come to life, laconic Francesco must shoot and re-bury them before they contaminate the local population. But when he falls hopelessly in love with a beautiful young girl, whom he kills by mistake, just what the differences are between being alive and dead become chillingly confused in his romantically damaged brain.

Soavi said, "Deep down, Francesco fantasises perfect love with an ethereal being. Unfortunately, the exquisite creature of his dreams turns out to be a gorgeous ghoul. The entire movie is a metaphor for life; a coming of age saga

told in fairytale horror terms. It's an ironic fantasy more about the violence of sentiments than blood and guts."

It was a reprimand from her son's school that alerted Tilde Corsi's attention to the movie potential of the Sclavi novel. She said, "I'd given him the book as a present. He loved it and lent it to a friend to read whose mother then complained to the school that it was completely unsuitable because it was full of sex and violence. She had assumed her child had borrowed it from the school library like I had assumed it was for children! It made me think that if Sclavi's book held their interest, a movie version might work for the widest possible audience."

## VOMIT CREATURE

Corsi then asked Soavi and Romoli for their opinion on the book and her idea of using it as their collective calling card to become producers. Soavi was enthusiastic but Gianni thought the principal character, "Was too bitter, too negative and without any hope whatsoever. Francesco was so used to death it was his normal way of life. Audiences would have slit their wrists watching a literal version of the book. I ended up writing five drafts of the script altogether making the story less and less nihilistic, necrophilic and pessimistic each time."

Romoli, co-writer of Argento's *Trauma*, continued, "One sequence I do regret losing is where Francesco vomited up a creature in the form of a question mark."



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**"It could be the horror  
movie to end all horror  
movies"**



**"He axed for it!"**





"Mirror, mirror on the wall..."

expensive set construction and was also written out."

Eventually the \$4 million budget (high by Italian standards) was raised and Dellamorte Dellamore was filmed in seven weeks at an actual cemetery outside Orvieto with interiors shot in Rome studios.

Soavi pointed out, "I'm going for the full comic strip look. I didn't use storyboards. I cut out individual panels from the *Dylan Dog* comic and strung them together for visual inspiration. The framing, the shadows and the lighting are of the utmost importance. The photography by Mauro Marchetti is highlighting subtleties for a more magical feel. I've never done anything remotely like this before. Nor will anyone have seen anything like it. I've felt the owner of a new language - one I'm using to give space to the dramatic sentiments in what is basically a black fable about today's Blank Generation."

## WE ARE THE LIVING DEAD!

Such subtext was vital to Rupert Everett. He wouldn't have acted in the movie if this hadn't been present. He remarked, "I hate horror movies for the simple reason they don't have stories. Nothing usually makes any sense and they bore me because they are all about events not character. *Dellamorte Dellamore* is more an ironic *roman a clef* using the horror film structure as a springboard. It's as much a Walt Disney cartoon as anything else, the flippant humour making it even harder to categorise. Francesco could just as easily be a banker as a gravedigger."

The star of *Another Country* and *The Comfort Of Strangers* added, "The movie begins normally but then becomes a morality play as it segues into a neon-lit portrait of a serial killer. Death here means emotional death, pop-arted into a mad psychedelic fantasy. In my mind



The world's first  
Zombie boy scout!

Sclavi's story is how he sees contemporary life in Italy; the people, the governmental betrayal, the mafia scandals, the bleak future. The Living Dead/Returners are us in effect because we've all become so boring, so cauterised, so politically correct. What the movie says is there is no such thing as normal. You must just grasp what life throws at you. In Francesco's case he goes from being a killer of the dead to a killer of the living because he becomes so emotionally zapped by the same woman in different disguises."

Co-starring alongside Everett as the three incarnations of Francesco's ideal lover is supermodel Anna Falchi. French pop star Francois Hadji-Lazaro plays his trusted dumb helper Gnaghi, or as Soavi described him, "Sancho Panza to Francesco's Don Quixote." Everyone agrees over what the major *Dellamorte Dellamore* challenge was though - devising a different zombie look without resorting to Romero cliché. To overcome

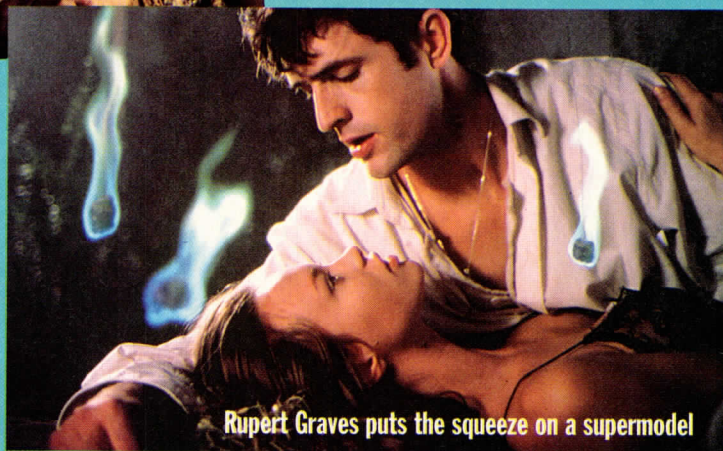
this, Soavi went back to his roots, literally.

He remarked, "I'm tied to nature and the environment in my soul. Francesco has a similar rapport with the earth mainly because gravedigging is obviously that sort of job; he always gets his hands and boots dirty burying the corpses. I wondered how I could poetically connect the dead bodies to the earth and it came

**"Deep down, Francesco fantasises perfect love with an ethereal being. Unfortunately, the exquisite creature of his dreams turns out to be a gorgeous ghoul..."**

to me when I figured they could take their energy from plant roots. So when they rise up, the dead are scarred by root remains." Once more, the special make-up effects were realised by Soavi regular Sergio (*Demons*) Stivaletti and his six man team.

Although Soavi feels *Dellamorte Dellamore* has connections with *The Sect* on a cerebral level, he ultimately sees it



Rupert Graves puts the squeeze on a supermodel

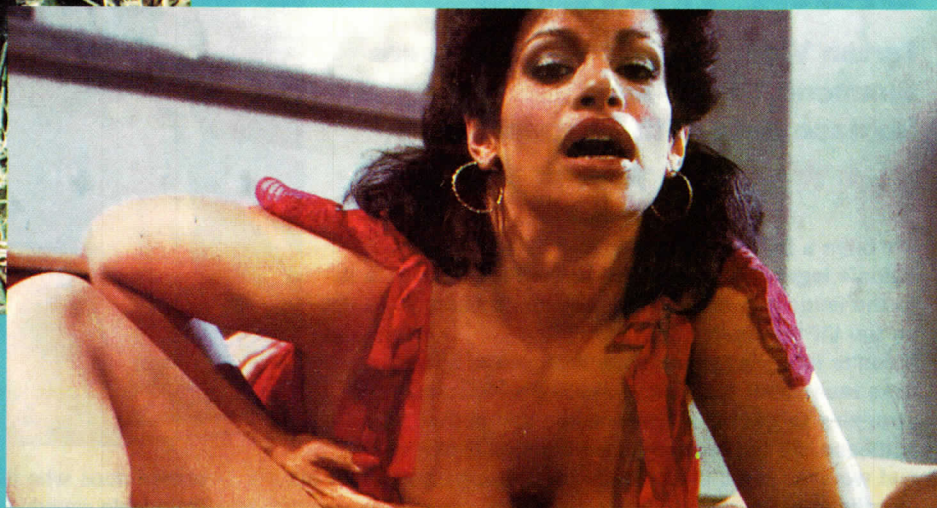
as a complete twist on the usual pasta gore fare. He pointed out, "You see, it doesn't focus on scares, shocks, a killer or the murders. The tension is built more towards the arrival at a caress, perhaps even a kiss, than bloody slaughter."

Francesco isn't scared of the Returners. They're a routine part of his job and each dispatch is quick and to the point. No, he's scared of love, commitment, disappointment, the impossible dream and the living who make unreasonable demands on his valuable time. That's the out-of-step atmosphere which is making this so hard to direct. It's all about opposites. Mainly it's a horror movie for people who never see them, like Rupert in fact. As such it could be the horror movie to end all horror movies."



jawed and dependable of British actors. He emerged from playing a host of character roles to become a top international star in the 50s. His finest asset was his rich and fruity voice, which alas disappeared in 1966 after an operation for throat cancer removed his vocal chords. His death, seven years later, resulted from haemorrhaging following an operation to implant a 'voice

**Right: Carole Bouquet admires Roger Moore's eyebrows**  
**Left: Christopher Walken and Robert De Niro in *The Deer Hunter***  
**Below: Vanessa Del Rio in action!**



box.' In his latter films Jack was dubbed by the similar-sounding actors Charles Gray and Robert Rietty. Here's the full list of his movies: 1930: *Birds Of Prey*; 1932: *The Lodger*; 1933: *The Lost Chord*; *The Good Companions*; *I Lived With You*; *The Jewel*; *A Shot In The Dark*; 1934: *Lorna Doone*; *Autumn Crocus*; *Death At Broadcasting House*; 1935: *Peg Of Old Drury*; 1937: *Beauty And The Barge*; *The Frog*; 1938: *Who Goes Next?*; *A Royal Divorce*; 1939: *Murder Will Out*; 1940: *The Flying Squad*; 1942: *Next Of Kin*; 1948: *The Fallen Idol*; *Bonnie Prince Charlie*; *The Small Back Room*; 1950: *The Black Rose*; *The Elusive Pimpernell*; *State Secret*; *The Adventurers*; 1951: *No Highway*; *Home At Seven*; 1952: *Mandy*; *The Planter's Wife*; *Angels One Five*; 1953: *The Cruel Sea*; *Pathway Into Light*; *Twice Upon A Time*; *The Malta Story*; *The Intruder*; *Prince Philip*; *Front Page Story*; 1954: *The Seekers*; *Land Of The Pharaohs*; 1955: *The Prisoner*; *Touch And Go*; 1956: *The Long Arm*; *The Man In The Sky*; 1957: *The Battle For Britain*; *Fortune Is A Woman*; *The Bridge On The River Kwai*; 1958: *Gideon's Day*; *The Two-Headed Spy*; 1959: *Ben-Hur*; 1960: *The League Of Gentlemen*; 1961: *La Fayette*; *Two Loves*; 1962: *Lawrence Of Arabia*;

*Five Finger Exercise*; *Rampage*; 1963: *Zulu*; 1964: *The Third Secret*; *Guns At Batasi*; *Masquerade*; *Lord Jim*; 1965: *Judith*; 1966: *Danger Grows Wild*; 1967: *Great Catherine*; 1968: *Shalako*; 1969: *Oh! What A Lovely War*; *Monte Carlo Or Bust*; *Twinky*; *The Adventures Of Gerard*; 1970: *The Beloved*; *Jane Eyre*; *Waterloo*; 1971: *When Eight Bells Toll*; *Kidnapped*; *Nicholas And Alexandra*; *Young Winston*; 1972: *Escape To The Sun*; 1973: *Theatre Of Blood*; *Tales That Witness Madness*; *The Last Lion*; 1974: *QBVII* (TV movie). The following Jack Hawkins movies are on video: *The Fallen Idol*; *Bridge On The River Kwai*; *Lawrence Of Arabia*; *Ben-Hur*; *Zulu*; *Monte Carlo Or Bust*; *Shalako* and *Theatre Of Blood*.

## HAVE A HEART!

**When I was a mere slip of a lad I remember being frightened out of a night's sleep by watching a really**

**gory horror movie on the telly. I don't know the title, but I can remember that it was a series of short horror stories and the one that sticks in my mind had to do with a zombie coming out of his grave to tear someone's heart out on St Valentine's day. Can you tell me what this film is called, and if it's available on video?**

**Steve Grant, Cardiff**

No problem. The film in question is the 1972 Amicus production of *Tales From The Crypt*, and the story you remember so well tells of a ruthless property developer who torments kindly old Peter Cushing into an early grave by sending him a sackful of nasty Valentine cards. A year after Cushing's death, his zombified remains return to tear out the property developer's heart and deliver it in a package to his dad - still beating!